

Sermon: July 25, 2021

“Waiting for a Miracle”

Written by: Rev. Jessica M. Townsley

Scripture: John 6:1-21

Prayer before the message:

Ephesians 3:14-21

Gracious God, from whom every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. I pray that, according to the riches of your glory, you may grant that we may be strengthened in our inner being with power through your Spirit, that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith, as we are being rooted and grounded in love. I pray that we may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that we may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to you who by the power at work within us is able to accomplish abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine, to you be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

I've never been a huge fan of elaborate jewelry. I've taken to wearing a few pieces all the time—none of which would be considered fine jewelry by society's standards. A few years ago, after my maternal grandmother passed away, I wanted a simple piece—something symbolic of family to remind me of my grandmother and the strength of those family ties. But, since it would be replacing the cross, I used to wear, I didn't want to leave faith out of the equation, so I needed something that would be inclusive of that pillar in my life. The symbol I ended up settling on was that of a tree—one with visible roots shown spreading down and out into the ground. The symbolism as pertains to family is fairly obvious—we speak often of our roots and the family tree, of course. But the tree and roots also have religious and spiritual symbolism. The prayer I just prayed with you is part

of Paul's letter to the Ephesian church and it waxes rather poetically, for Paul, about being rooted and grounded in love. It's fitting, I think, given that we're outside among the trees and grass, gathered together at a park, rooted and grounded in the love of the One who calls us to be the church.

In our gospel passage for today, we find the disciples and Jesus confronted with the realities of the natural world and of being a people gathered. What will they eat? Jesus calmly sits and tests the disciples asking where they could possibly buy enough bread to feed 5,000 people. Phillip notes their lack of funds, but they had a bigger problem than where the money would come from—because even if they had enough to buy the bread, it's not possible in a Galilean town that there would be enough bread produced to feed as many people as had followed them. Most villages only had a few hundred residents and even those with a few thousand wouldn't have had enough barley to produce the loaves necessary let alone have enough bread prepared and made. Andrew helpfully notes that there is a boy carrying two fish and five loaves of bread—but surely this is not enough to feed 5,000. Jesus, calmly listens as they begin to panic as they, realize that the people will go hungry, completely forgetting that they are commissioned by God for this journey and traveling with a man who is known for his miracles. Jesus by now must be thinking, “Will they *never* learn? Did they not witness the wedding at Cana? Have they not seen me doing miracles before their very eyes? I've raised healed the sick, raised the dead, what *will* it take?”

Now, as a human being and as a pastor, I can relate to the concerns of the disciples. Andrew and Philip are speaking to very real concerns of the lives even we live today. They aren't looking back to the examples of Jesus's

miracles thus far, nor are they looking to scripture for the stories of such prophets as Moses and Elisha presiding over the feeding of large numbers of people with relatively little. They don't think about manna in the desert or 20 loaves feeding 200 and even if they did, 5000 is a lot of people for 5 loaves and 2 fish. Their concerns, their worries are real and understandable—but John's gospel tells us here that they may also indicate a lack of faith that God will provide.

How often are we overwhelmed like the disciples? How often do we fear that scarcity before our eyes will lead to permanent scarcity? And even if we don't worry for ourselves, how often do we look at the depth and breadth of hunger in our town, state and country (not to mention the *world*) and think, what are our resources among so much pain and hunger and suffering? It's easy to feel paralyzed by the meagerness of our resources against the enormity of the need. We might think, but I am only one and this is only a few dollars, what difference will that possibly make? We might look at Jeff Bezos' recent 200 Million dollars in donations (after blowing billions to get to the edge of space for 4 minutes) and think, what can my few dollars do? We are not billionaires. We can barely make ends meet sometimes.

My best friend from college, Emma, has sweet sons like I do. Her eldest, Everett, one day asked Emma how he could help other kids. So, Emma gave him some examples, one of which was to donate money to a helping organization. He knew of one particular organization from his mom called One Simple Wish, which spreads hope and love by granting wishes, through the help of the internet, to those in need. Everett asked her if he

could send them \$20. So that's what they did, they sent \$20 with a note saying,

“Dear One Simple Wish, This money is for you to help kids. I like when you help kids. From, Everett.”

Well, this so moved the organization, that they shared this story of generosity of spirit on their social media, which prompted person after person to ask how they could match Everett's donation so that more kids can be helped. They received much more than that \$20, they got over \$1000 in under a month to help other children all because Everett asked how he could help. It wasn't much at the start. It couldn't grant many big wishes, but Everett had faith that that money could do some good. And then that money multiplied just like the loaves and fishes. St. Theresa who we used to know as Mother Theresa called this doing “small things with great love.”

It's tempting to think that our contributions are meaningless. We look at the vastness of the need in the world and think, how can my meager contribution possibly even make a dent in all the pain and suffering? How can my few dollars really help anyone? We can be so overwhelmed by the thought that we give up. And who could blame us, really? What's five loaves and two fish compared to over 5,000 hungry people? What's \$20 when so many kids go to sleep hungry or don't have a roof over their heads? So, we might throw our hands up in the air and give up.

Or, we could be moved to compassion like Jesus and like Everett, rooted and grounded in love, and give what we have, give what we can, and allow God to work through us. Like the tree in the ground whose roots spread

much further than we can understand, God's Spirit is alive and vast and moving all throughout the world making a difference in the lived realities of people all over the world.

The boy in John's gospel gives his five loaves and two fish—it's all he has, all any of them have, and feeds 5000+ hungry people on the top of a mountain. "What are 5 loaves and 2 fish among so many people?" Philip asks. Jesus replies, "Sit down. Wait and see what they can do with God's help." Because even when we doubt, even when we fail the tests of faith before us, Jesus remains faithful. God is always faithful. When we act from hearts rooted and grounded in the love of God, God gives beyond our wildest dreams.

You know, this week in our Zoom VBS, one of the Bible verses was from Paul's second letter to the church at Corinth, "God loves a cheerful giver" (9:7). What could be more cheerful than the giving that comes from a child like the boy on the mountaintop with the loaves and fishes or young Everett wanting to do what he can to help other children? These stories happen every day and they are proof that while we're busy worrying that there's not enough, God's spirit is still working in the world.

While we're waiting for the right time to help or for someone else to step in, the Spirit of the living God is still speaking miracles into existence every single day. The breadth and length and height and depth of the love of God promises that not only will there be enough, but as we see in our stories this week there will be more than we can imagine. So, this week, rooted and grounded in the love of God, I urge you to follow Everett's example: If you see a need, give what you can to fill it even if it doesn't seem like

enough. Do something small and do it with the greatest of loves behind it.
Amen.